

wavelength), the multi-layer stack causes reflection of optical radiation to occur not only at (and around) the predetermined "design" wavelength, but also at (and around) other wavelengths corresponding to "higher order" frequencies equal to an odd-integer multiple of the "design" frequency. The result is known as a " $\frac{1}{4}$ -wave" stack, or "interference filter".

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Thus, such a quarter-wave stack may be employed as an optical filter for reflecting IR radiation by selecting the predetermined wavelength to be a suitable IR wavelength such that a reflection band is formed adjacent a desired spectral pass-band. However, a drawback of such interference filters is that the aforementioned "higher order" reflection bands often reside well within the desired spectral pass-band. Thus, such filters may well reflect radiation which it is not desirable to reflect.

Other types of multi-stack optical interference filter have been proposed in which the multi-layer stack is composed of materials having three different refractive indices rather than just two. An example of that sort of optical filter is described in US 6 107 564. By appropriately arranging the three different layer types in a repeating pattern within the

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stack of layers, the resultant structure is able to
suppress the first few of the offending "higher

Accordingly, in a first of its aspects, the present invention may provide an optical filter including a substrate having a plurality of layers of materials 5 stacked upon it each of which layers is formed from one or both of:

a first material having a first index of refraction; and, a second material having a second index of refraction being less than the first index of refraction; 10 wherein the plurality of layers of materials include a first layer and a second layer each and a third layer formed from the first material (H) being stacked in between the first layer and the second layer; wherein the optical thickness of each of said first and 15 said second layers is greater than the optical thickness of said third layer, characterized in that the first layer and second layers are each formed from an inhomogeneous mixture (M) of said first material (H) and said second material (L), in that 20 the optical thickness of said first layer and of said second layer each differ in magnitude from the value $2Q$ by less than $Q/2$, and the optical thickness of said third layer differs in magnitude from the value Q by less than $Q/2$, where Q is the thickness of a given said layer 25 traversed by substantially one quarter of a wavelength of optical radiation of a common reference wavelength at

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traversed by substantially one quarter of a wavelength of optical radiation of a common reference wavelength at which said optical thicknesses are determined, and in that all variations in the index of refraction (21 or 25 5 or 27 ; 23 or 26 or 28) of the first and second layer increase that index of refraction as the depth of the respective layer increases from regions thereof remote from said third layer to regions thereof proximate the third layer.

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Due to the inhomogeneous mixing of the first material and the second material, when forming the first and second layers, the index of refraction of those layers varies with the depth of the layer between values greater than 15 the second index of refraction and less than the first index of refraction.

Thus, by constructing an interference filter in the form of a multi-layer stack (on a substrate) comprising a

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Accordingly, in a third of its aspects, the present invention may provide a method of producing an optical filter for use with a photovoltaic cell, the method

5 including:

providing a substrate;

stacking a plurality of layers of materials upon the substrate each of which layers is formed from one or both of:

10 a first material having a first index of refraction; and, a second material having a second index of refraction being less than the first index of refraction;

including forming a first layer and a second layer of the plurality of layers, and forming from the first material

15 a third layer of the plurality of layers being stacked between said first and second layers, wherein the optical thickness of each of said first and second layers is greater than the optical thickness of said third layer,

characterized in that it includes

20 forming the first layer and second layer from an inhomogeneous mixture of the first material and the second material, and wherein said first layer and said second layer are each formed with an optical thickness which differs in magnitude from the value $2Q$ by less than

25 $Q/2$, and said third layer is formed with an optical thickness which differs in magnitude from the value Q by

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less than $Q/2$, where Q is the thickness of a given said
layer traversed by substantially one quarter of a
wavelength of optical radiation of a common reference
wavelength at which said optical thicknesses are
5 determined, and wherein the first and/or second layer is
formed such that all variations in the index of
refraction of the first and/or second layer increase that
index of refraction as the depth of the respective layer
increases from regions thereof remote from said third
10 layer to regions thereof proximate the third layer.

Due to the inhomogeneous mixture of the first material
and the second material when forming the first and second
layers, the index of refraction of the first and second
15 layer varies with the depth of the intermediate layers
between values greater than the second index of
refraction and less than the first index of refraction.

The first layer and second layer may be formed such that
20 the optical thicknesses thereof differ, or such that the
optical thicknesses thereof are substantially equal in
value. Where the first layer and the second layer are
each formed to have an optical thickness of equal value,
this value may be substantially equal to $2Q$, or may be
25 equal to some other value differing from $2Q$ by less than

19 bis

Q/2. The third layer may be formed to have an optical thickness substantially equal to Q.

The method may include the step of forming a pair of
5 outerlayers, being part of the plurality of layers, each
being formed from the second material wherein the outer
layers are formed with the first, second and third layers
being stacked between them. The pair of outer layers may